

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1955

Volume XVI, Number 5

Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor*

Week of February 21, 1955

1955 PRODUCTIONS Premieres in Other Years Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

Stage Play	1954 Vol.	Page
*Anastasia		192
*Anniversary Waltz		339
*Bad Seed (The)		223
*Boy Friend (The)		299
Caine, Mutiny Court Martial (The)		382
Dear Charles		316
*Fanny		256
*Flowering Peach (The)		196
*House of Flowers		189
*Lunatics and Lovers		219
*Mrs. Patterson		231
*Pajama Game (The)		324
*Peter Pan		273
*Quadrille		259
Rainmaker (The)		264
Reclining Figure		294
*Saint of Bleecker Street (The)		199
Sandhog		239
Tender Trap (The)		282
*Wedding Breakfast		243
What Every Woman Knows		208
*Witness for the Prosecution		216

	1953 Vol.	Page
*Can-Can		304
*Kismet		198
Solid Gold Cadillac (The)		222
*Tea and Sympathy		266
*Teahouse of the August Moon (The)		254

	1952 Vol.	Page
*Seven Year Itch (The)		186

	1951 Vol.	Page
Fourposter (The)		190

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of February 21, 1955

1955 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1955

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	Page
*Desperate Hours (The)	370
Doctor's Dilemma (The)	397
Festival	393
Grand Prize (The)	385
*Plain and Fancy	382
*Southwest Corner (The)	374
Time of Your Life (The)	390
*Tonight in Samarkand	365
*Wayward Saint (The)	362
Wisteria Trees (The)	377

Theatre Openings

"Tonight in Samarkand"
"The Wayward Saint"

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of February 21, 1955

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST

NEW YORK MIRROR

NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.
Yearly Subscription \$25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"The Wayward Saint"



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

February 18, 1955

Devil Gets His Due In 'Wayward Saint'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Paul Vincent Carroll has written an Irish romp in his new comedy, "The Wayward Saint."

He pokes fun at the clergy and their parishioners alike in the play at the Cort. In bald fact, it is a fantasy. In truth, though, it seems perfectly logical for a lion to make friends with the canon of the title and to eat up his enemies in an emergency.

The mood of partial realism is somehow distinctly Irish. The play would unquestion-

ably double its charm and multiply its zany logic if it were acted by a truly Hibernian cast.

This production does not do it justice.

The central character is a canon who is in poor repute with his bishop. He has never claimed to be a saint. Neither has he entirely denied the miraculous appearance of certain acts of his.

Cleric Under Guard.

Now transferred to a new post, he is denied the pet animals he loves. He is put in

the hands of a severe housekeeper.

Along comes a satanic messenger, assigned to cause trouble. The visitor encourages the canon to practice magic.

The canon sneaks his pets back. When a circus lion escapes, he brings him into the household. But things begin to go wrong. The Luciferite tries to dispose of the canon altogether. But his bluff is called, and the lion consumes him, to the tune of fatal indigestion.

Magic Needed.

In the end, the canon is disclaiming any trace of sainthood. But he is ordered to Rome to have his case investigated.

You can see that this is a play which needs lightness, spirit and real magic in the playing. It rarely gets any of these.

Liam Redmond has a vast advantage over the rest of the company. He is a natural for his role of the canon, is clearly familiar with the play and is unmistakably Irish.

Between the Devil.

Paul Lukas is caught in the unfortunate position of being starred in what is obviously not a starring role.

"THE WAYWARD SAINT"

Play by Paul Vincent Carroll, with incidental music by Sylvan Levin and dramatic pantomime by Betty Luster; staged by John Gerstad; designed and lighted by Frederick Fox; costumes by Audre; presented by Courtney Burr and John Byram with Elliott Nugent at the Cort Theatre, February 17, 1955. The cast: Cannon Daniel McCooley.....

Liam Redmond
The Bishop of Oriel.....
William Harrigan
Miss Killicat..... Eleanor Wilson
Maura..... Pat Breslin
Paedar the Puck... Dennis Patrick
Baron Nicholas de Balbus....
Paul Lukas
Sabena..... Betty Luster
Serena..... Marsha Reynolds
Salambo..... Frederic Warriner
Martyn McDara... Cullen Desmond
Joe..... Albert Corbin

William Harrigan is the bishop and somehow seems too raw-tempered for such a dignitary. Eleanor Wilson plays the rejuvenated housekeeper.

Dennis Patrick has charm and sincerity as a loyal follower of the canon, and Pat Breslin is convincing as the young girl.

New York Post

February 18, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Fantasy About a Modern Saint

There is so much that is delightful in Paul Vincent Carroll's "The Wayward Saint" that I wish I could applaud it with complete and unreserved enthusiasm. And, when it comes to Liam Redmond's enchanting performance in the title role, the approval can be without restraint. In other respects, Mr. Carroll's

"comedy-fantasy," as he calls it, which opened last night at the Cort Theater, only too frequently fails to live up to its many high points, but there is no taking away from it the imagination, sweetness and humor that have gone into its conception.

In his new play, the distinguished Irish author of those memorable works, "Shadow and Substance" and "The White Steed," has returned to his favorite subject of the joys and sorrows of the Catholic clergy in Ireland. This time he is in a slightly prankish mood as he con-

templates the plight of a gentle old priest who is a kind of modern St. Francis of Assisi. In addition to loving his fellow man, the priest is also on the friendliest terms of intimate affection with the birds and the beasts, and there is the dark suspicion afoot that he is truly a saint.

This naturally causes him a great deal of trouble in his diocese, and it is a source of considerable worry to his bishop, who has a high regard for the fine old fellow, but is far from comfortable when it comes to dealing with living saints. Since Mr. Carroll is writing a fantasy,

he brings in a mysterious foreign gentleman who is an emissary of the Devil, as well as his assisting nymphs and a roving lion who takes the old priest's side. But my own feeling is that the play is happiest when it sticks to the problems of a saint in a saintless world.

Anyway, for better or worse, the Devil's agent does arrive, and he strives to tempt the priest by an appeal to his pride. He lures the good old man into rather enjoying his holiness, and he even enables him to perform a trumpery miracle or two. No doubt both Mr. Carroll and the bishop are right in disapproving of the sin of pride, but I suspect the author of being a trifle unfair to the Satanic visitor. The priest gets so much innocent fun from his miracles that I, for one, couldn't greatly blame the evil one for letting him enjoy himself.

My annoyance with Mr. Carroll's Devil arises from a different cause. For one thing, I'd blame him for bringing in those nymphs, who do some rather uninteresting dancing. For another, he is responsible for the more serious parts of the play,

and here, when the problems of good and evil are being earnestly regarded, the evening is at its weakest. I also thought he was made a surprisingly uninteresting figure by the usually skillful Paul Lukas, who gives him the proper urbanity but fails completely to suggest his sinister charm and subtle guile.

On the other hand, it would be difficult to imagine a more beguiling portrayal than Mr. Redmond offers as the old priest. Sweetness can be terribly dangerous on the stage, but this is a characterization that can suggest authentic saintliness and remain humorous and really lovable. There is likewise a charming performance of a lovelorn maiden by the lovely Pat Breslin, while William Harrigan as the bishop and Eleanor Wilson as the priest's housekeeper are excellent. "The Wayward Saint" unfortunately lacks consistent effectiveness, and it is too often heavy-handed, but its fresh sweetness is remarkably disarming.

The New York Times

February 18, 1955

Theatre: 'Wayward Saint' in Ireland

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THANKS in large part to Liam Redmond's glowing performance, Paul Vincent Carroll's new play is enchanting. It is a "comedy-fantasy," labeled "The Wayward Saint," and acted at the Cort Thursday evening.

Mr. Redmond, fresh out of Ireland, has a wide mouth, a smiling face, a large head and a merry soul. In Mr. Carroll's pleasant drama, he plays the part of Canon Daniel McCooey, a parish priest whose unconventional habits, devotion to birds and animals, and general impulsiveness are a sore trial to the Bishop of the diocese.

It is hard to tell where Mr. Carroll leaves off and Mr. Redmond begins, since play and performance are closely entwined. But there is no doubt that Mr. Redmond evokes out of the lines and story the richness of humor Mr. Carroll has imagined. Without once overacting, Mr. Redmond has many ways of

bringing variety and depth into a play that is rather meagerly written. His little caper when he thinks he is defying the Bishop, his childish sulks, his laughing eyes and his sorrowful humility in the last act make everything that is possible out of the play and remind us of how glorious the Abbey Theatre actors were in their illustrious day.

"The Wayward Saint" is a light-hearted piece about the temptation of the canon by the devil's advocate. There is a rumor abroad that the canon is a saint who has raised a child from the dead. He does not believe it, but the rumor tickles his vanity.

And that is how the devil tempts him—by subtle appeals to his vanity and to his liking for worldly comfort. To the devil the soul of a saint is a priceless possession. He corrupts the canon by means that are almost imperceptible, and the canon enjoys his gentle downfall. But there comes a

time when he realizes that he has been betrayed and corrupted. His remorse is abject. When he doubts that he is a saint, he becomes one. Through loss of vanity, he rises in spiritual eminence.

Although Mr. Carroll's heart is in the right place, his pen is not an instrument of abundance. "The Wayward Saint" is a small play, written chiefly in the form of duologues; and the gestures toward fantasy do not have much scope. Mr. Carroll's imagination outruns his gifts of invention.

But these remarks are placed here chiefly for the record. For the gaiety, the sweetness, the innocence and the grace of spirit are qualities that outweigh the softness of the writing.

All the action takes place inside the homely living room of the presbytery, well designed and lighted by Frederick Fox. John Gerstad has directed an amiable performance. In the part of the devil's advocate, Paul Lukas seemed

to be off form Thursday evening. His speaking was occasionally unintelligible, and some of his acting was unsure. Some of the contrasts on which the play is founded were blurred by Mr. Lukas' unfinished performance.

There is a spirited performance by Pat Breslin as a love-sick maiden in a state of rebellion. She brings a lot of fire into the last act when the canon is in danger. There is an entertaining performance by Eleanor Wilson as a housekeeper who succumbs to vanity. As a tattered demalion neighborhood boy, Dennis Patrick is amusingly slippery and glib. William Harrigan is excellent as an implacably stern and sanctimonious Bishop wrestling with a freak of nature way outside his experience.

But Mr. Redmond's puckish canon is the central delight of play and performance. Being Irish himself, Mr. Redmond understands Mr. Carroll's stream of fantasy and truth more instinctively than any of the others. Being Irish, he has the bright gift of acting it with simplicity and humor.

Journal American

February 18, 1955

Charm of Fantasy Arrives Bit Late

By JOHN McCLAIN

"THE WAYWARD SAINT," a new comedy-fantasy by Paul Vincent Carroll which opened at the Cort Theatre last night, is decidedly a slow starter. Right away there is an interminable and only mildly humorous consideration of the plight of an Irish Catholic canon who has been banished to a small parish because of his uncontrollable affinity for birds and beasts.

There is the crotchety and imperious Bishop, who warns him that if he imports his domestic zoo from his former post he will be retired to a home for broken-down prelates in the hinterlands.

Things don't accelerate appreciably with the arrival of a strange Baron de Balbus, who is about to take possession of the manor house in the

district, but becomes the churchman's guest until it's ready. Not even when it becomes apparent that de Balbus is an emissary of the devil and the whimsical canon is a force for good that he has been dispatched to destroy.

There are the usual rumblings of thunder, the magical

appearances of other lieutenants of Lucifer, culminating in a scene in which a lion escapes from a circus and is completely cowed by the lovable prelate. Up to this time I felt Mr. Carroll had allowed himself to tell a pedestrian story carelessly.

But from the beginning of the third act the characters the author had been building began to breathe and the inexorable charm of the Irish set in. Contrived as it may seem, even the lion gained in grace, and it became a matter of moment whether or not the forces of evil would succeed in unseating the man of God.

This would not have been remotely possible without one of the season's most engaging performances by Liam Red-

mond, as Canon Daniel McCooey. Without resorting to the usual Irish shenanigans he projects a warm and wonderfully sympathetic interpretation of a devout servant of the cloth, staging a fierce and funny battle for his faith.

As the deputy of the Devil, Paul Lukas was suave and sinister most of the time, but it seemed to me he was unsure of himself on occasion. This is a shortcoming which, hopefully, time will correct.

Willie Harrigan provides a stern and dominant portrayal of the Bishop of the diocese of Oriel; Eleanor Wilson has a field day with the role of the household drudge who is transformed into a ravishing trollop, and Pat Breslin is extremely capable and decorative as the lovelorn local belle. There were other noble assists by Dennis Patrick and Albert Corbin, the lion.

I must say I believe the direction in the first part of the show could have been speeded up, or the scenes themselves brightened in script. The charm is there in the play, but it is desperately late in arriving. Too late to save the evening, I'm afraid.

"The Wayward Saint"—continued

Daily Mirror

February 18, 1955

'Wayward Saint,' at Cort, Stimulating, Rewarding

By ROBERT COLEMAN

An Irish actor named Liam Redmond completely won the hearts of a lot of us Thursday evening with a glowing performance in Paul Vincent Carroll's "The Wayward Saint." Seen here once before in a relatively minor role in Carroll's "The White Steed," Redmond has since soared to stardom in England.

HE IS CURRENTLY personating a very human Canon who loves birds and beasts, as did Saint Francis and Saint Jerome. He performs what are taken for miracles, with embarrassing consequences for his superior, the Bishop, who transfers him to a remote Parish. There he causes his Lordship even more trouble.

A stranger, really an emissary of Lucifer, upsets the

priest and his community. The former becomes a bit vain about his mystical powers, while the girls thereabouts become more than a bit vain about their looks. But innocence and humility, to say nothing of the most delightful stage lion seen hereabouts since Shaw's "Androcles," put the diabolical tempter to rout.

"The Wayward Saint" has some

of the humor of "Androcles" and much of the charm of "Father Malachy's Miracle." If it is not exactly an original play, it is nevertheless an entertaining, stimulating and rewarding one. It proves that the Faust legend can still be retold engagingly today.

IF REDMOND BE a captivating Canon, Paul Lukas is a satisfactory though not brilliant representative of the underworld. He seemed to be suffering from first-night jitters, to lack the assurance and polish which he will no doubt acquire soon. The ever-reliable William Harrigan is just right as the sympathetic but exasperated Bishop.

There are nice performances, too, by Eleanor Wilson, Pat Breslin, Dennis Patrick, Frederick Warriner and Cullen Desmond. Warriner happens to be one of our better and more accomplished young character actors. Betty Luster and Marsha Reynolds, as shapely, attractive balletic nymphs, seemed to us at least a bit superfluous.

And now for Albert Corbin, as

Joe, the endearing lion who comes to the Canon's rescue in his hour of need. He is droll, amiable and ferocious by turns. A nice fellow to have on your side in an emergency.

COURTNEY BURR and John Byram, in association with Elliott Nugent, sponsor "The Wayward Saint" at the Cort. Nugent, who supervised, and John Gerstad, who directed, have approached their respective tasks with obvious enthusiasm and relish. If their ministrations be less than perfect, they are commendable. For this is a difficult script to bring to life.

Frederick Fox has designed another of his excellent sets.

"The Wayward Saint" should prove a winning and warming evening in the theatre for those who can still dream in a mundane world, and have affection for its gentle and noble souls. Though it has some cosmic things to say, it is never stuffy or pretentious. We enjoyed it immensely and hope you will, too.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 18, 1955

THEATER

'The Wayward Saint'

By WALTER F. KERR

Puckish Padre

IN THE case of "The Wayward Saint," which opened at the Cort Thursday, Paul Vincent Carroll would seem to have written a fantasy of some grace, charm and asperity, and director John Gerstad seems to have staged it as though he were dealing with "Ma and Pa Kettle in Ireland."

Here is Mr. Carroll's amiable proposition: Canon Daniel McCooey, a potato-faced old fellow with a sheep's head of hair, has been working far too many "miracles" for his Bishop's peace of mind. He's been talking to birds and animals, for one thing ("If only I'd studied some one besides St. Francis," mourns the unlucky parish priest); and he's somehow or other managed to get a cherry tree to produce plums. Though he isn't at all proud of himself, and regards the gossip that he is a saint as a "lyin' scandal," he still must be hustled out of sight.

The pained Bishop ("Aw, Daniel, be good now") deposits him

in a remote country rectory that's a "sweet little hole, but terrible out of the way," deprives him of his beloved animals, and puts him to work knitting ecclesiastical socks. Things don't stay that way, of course. A mysterious baron, with a faint odor of sulphur about him, turns up, a friendly lion strolls in at the garden windows, the padre learns a few new tricks from the baron and begins to preen himself on his supernatural powers, and—well, at eleven o'clock he's perched in a chair ten feet off the floor bemoaning the loss of his immortal soul.

Nearly all of this is fetchingly and sensibly worked out. The little morality tale that runs along underneath the nonsense—the business of a good man's learning to take too much satisfaction in his own virtue—is pointedly and jovially developed. And Paul Vincent Carroll is full, as always, of tart and trenchant jibes at clerical housekeeping, over-age Irish bachelors, and the wooden-headed ways of men.

The lines are often sassy, and sweet to the ear.

Better yet, an actor named Liam Redmond has been brought over from Ireland to shiver his jowls, blow out his cheeks, and cast leery eyes heavenward as the incorrigible McCooey. The range of the role is no problem to this puckish player. When he is praised by the visiting devil, a veil of shy humility falls over his face like a winsome sunset. When he is convinced that he must be a saint after all, and discovers that he can stop clocks and command the thunder at will, a glorious swagger comes over him. Whether he is cockily stretching his feet on a lion's back and defying his Bishop, or grimly facing up to the fact that he has all but ruined a couple of hopeful young lives, he is a thoroughly endearing old boy.

But a genial simplicity is not enough for Mr. Gerstad. Mr. Gerstad has apparently been reading the funnies, and it is his notion that the evening will be enormously improved by low-comedy make-ups, strong doses of housemaid comedy, maximum huffing and puffing as a terrified cleric answers the telephone, and a real dash of the old Sennett as a bishop and friend tussle with the saint to keep him from tearing to a donkey's rescue.

Nor is the kind of imagination that has gone into the produc-

tion ever up to the imaginative level of the writing. I have, in fact, never seen a play struck quite so suddenly dead as "The Wayward Saint" is the moment it tangles with out-and-out fantasy. Paul Lukas, giving a somewhat insecure performance as the debonaire agent of Satan, has been left alone for a moment in the North Island rectory. He claps his hands for his underworld agents to appear. They do. And they are, shatteringly, a couple of refugees from the chorus line of the Latin Quarter: chicks in black boas and spangles. Whatever winning qualities the evening has had up to now are instantly dismissed; later, they are laboriously re-won by Redmond and associates, only to be dashed again with each heavy-handed, badly choreographed, psychologically inexplicable eruption from Hell.

The play gets assistance from several quarters. Frederick Fox' warm and spacious living-room, for instance, has a decided glow of its own. William Harrigan is a mountain of quivering strength as a Bishop who distrusts saints. Pat Breslin is a very pretty ingenue, and the curiously hesitant Mr. Lukas does have a few snatches of wicked humor—particularly when he is making quick agreement with the heavens to behave himself.

But "The Wayward Saint" is a light, droll antic that has been sadly drubbed in the doing.

"The Wayward Saint"—continued

DAILY NEWS

February 18, 1955

'The Wayward Saint' an Errant Little Morsel of Irish Whimsey

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Paul Vincent Carroll's "The Wayward Saint," which opened last evening at the Cort Theatre, is a small bit of Irish whimsy which serves chiefly to bring back to us an amiable character actor, Liam Redmond. Somewhere between playwright Carroll's imagination and the stage of the Cort something must have disappeared or been shunted aside, for there is not enough in the play to make it satisfying.

Redmond, a jolly, big-featured son of the old sod, plays a priest—a canon, no less—who has won

some renown for a couple of seemingly miraculous works of faith. When local folk begin calling him a saint he puts in a properly modest disclaimer. But when the devil himself persuades the old boy that he really is a saint and can pass miracles, the churchman gets into trouble. For a while he has a lot of fun stopping clocks, command-

ing lamps to light, taming a lion and arousing thunderclaps—but in the end he comes to realize that these powers are less than holy and therefore no good.

It isn't much of a story, it isn't much of a play, and last evening it wasn't much of a performance—for except for Redmond the cast was decidedly uncertain. Paul Lukas, in the role of a well-dressed Lucifer, looked sleek and suave but didn't act that way as he invaded the presbytery of the churchman and began building up the old fellow's ego. He seemed to be wor-

ried about something—his lines, perhaps—and no respectable devil ever worries.

There was another unsure performance by William Harrigan in the role of a cranky bishop, and a rather amusing one by Eleanor Wilson in the part of a prim housekeeper who falls for the devil's blandishments and fancies herself a femme fatale.

There is a lot of imagination in "The Wayward Saint," but it strikes me as being quite ordinary imagination—something that anybody could dream up without being either Irish or a playwright. Such stuff as thunderclaps, suddenly dimmed lights and apparitions of slinkily clad dancing girls. However, Redmond is an amusing fellow—sort of a Hibernian Foxy Grandpa. Frederick Fox has provided a pleasant setting. John Gerstad is the director.

"Tonight in Samarkand"

The New York Times

February 17, 1955

Theatre: Magic Fails the Magician

And Destiny Triumphs in 'Samarkand'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

"TONIGHT IN SAMARKAND," which opened at the Morosco Wednesday evening, is a play about magic that needs a little more magic in its own right.

Jacques Deval, author of "Tovarich," and Lorenzo Semple Jr. have written a play with a circus background and a fascinating legend about fate. Sourab Kayam, who can read the crystal ball, helps the woman he loves to escape a terrible destiny. She is fated to go down on the liner Hollandia, which sails on her birthday.

By putting their heads together, Sourab and the woman appear to have gotten away from all the circumstances leading to the Hollandia. But in the last scene they find themselves caught in the Hollandia's web. Nothing they have done can save them from a rendezvous with death in their counterpart of fatal Samarkand.

There are many reasons why "Tonight in Samarkand" ought to be wholly captivating. The background of a traveling French circus is festive and bizarre. Frank Spencer has dressed the actors in carnival splendor, and Ben Edwards has solved the mechanical problems of the scenery with extraordinary skill.

For every act concludes with a realistic scene representing the images glimpsed in the crystal ball. In his mobile scenery, Mr. Edwards has found the way to get out of the circus tent and into hotel rooms and an apartment with an ingenuity that is more theatrical than the play.

Count as additional virtues some interesting actors who create two or three enchanting scenes. Louis Jourdan and Jan Farrand, as the magician and his sweetheart, play with considerable gusto. All the actors, under Alan Schneider's direction, bring something fresh to the performance—Michael Gorin as a circus impresario, Alexander Scourby as an intruder from the outside world, and Rita Vale as his sardonic sister; Halliwell

New Play's Setting Is Circus in France

Hobbes as an aged bishop, Rosemary Prinz as a gay little child of the circus; Marian Reardon as an uninhibited circus performer.

As a forebearing police inspector Theodore Bikel is responsible for two of the best scenes. In the midst of the circus ebullience, he plays with a relaxed deliberation that changes the pace and introduces order into disorder. Probably the general performance is too restless and busy. That may be one reason why his two scenes are so exhilarating in contrast.

Still, we have to deal with the fact that a play with an imaginative idea, interesting characters and gay decor never really works its magical spell. "Tonight in Samarkand" lacks suspense. By introducing the macabre legend of Samarkand into the dialogue early in the play, the authors define their solution almost before they get started.

"TONIGHT IN SAMARKAND"

Play by Jacques Deval and Lorenzo Semple, Jr.; with music composed and arranged by Sol Kaplan; staged by Alan Schneider; settings and lighting by Ben Edwards; costumes by Frank Spencer; presented by Bruce Becker and Robert Ellis Miller at the Morosco Theatre, February 16, 1955. The cast: Pandore.....Rosemary Prinz Mario.....Sheppard Kerman Angelo Fannacci...Pernell Roberts Guri.....Marian Reardon Inspector Massoubre.....

Theodore Bikel Nericia.....Jan Farrand Sourab Kayam....Louis Jourdan Poliakov.....Michael Gorin Therese.....Joyce Lear Paul Tabourier.....

Alexander Scourby Leontine Tabourier...Rita Vale Perignolles....Halliwell Hobbes

The rest of the play is the illustration of their solution. That may be one reason why Sourab Kayam's magic never really takes hold of the whole drama and takes it out of the everyday world. Too bad, for there are a lot of engrossing ideas in "Tonight in Samarkand."

"Tonight in Samarkand"—continued

New York Post

February 17, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Drama of Doom's Inevitability

Do you remember the ironic little parable about the inevitability of one's destiny that John O'Hara used as the foreword to his distinguished novel, "Appointment in Samarra"? Jacques Deval has gone to the same sinister anecdote for the theme of a very different narrative in "Tonight in Samarkand," which

opened last night at the Morosco Theater. Adapted into English by Lorenzo Semple Jr., the resulting play has an ironic theatrical interest of its own, even though it is a little faltering and heavy-handed in going about it.

Possibly your memory should be refreshed on the subject of the parable, since it was a lot of years ago that "Appointment in Samarra" was written. It has to do with a man who met a lady whom

he recognized as Death in the market place in Bagdad. So he rushed off to Samarra or Samarkand, depending on whether you take Mr. O'Hara or M. Deval as your authority, only to find that was the place where the date with destiny had actually been intended to take place. The point, it hardly need be added, is that you can't escape your appointed doom.

In the Deval-Semple narrative, the victims of an ill-fated destiny are two performers in a small

French traveling circus. One is a lady who trains tigers and rather prefers them to men; the other is a magician and fortune-teller, who isn't quite sure whether he is a faker or a prophet. All he knows is that he can apparently see part of the way into the future of others but is unable to tell what will happen to him. His crystal ball shows him that the girl he loves is destined to die on an ocean liner on her birthday.

The ethics of a reviewer's obligation to tell or conceal the outcome of an author's ingenious plot hardly enters into the case here. The authors of "Tonight in Samarkand" have provided a pretty fair clue in their title. What they are offering is a frankly fabricated tale of sardonic doom, and, if they have been rather tricky about it, they have every justification in the very nature of their narrative. It does seem to me, though, that they have gone about their melodramatic business in a frequently desultory fashion.

In fact, my major complaint

against the play is that each of its three acts seems to take a long time to get to grips with its subject. The result is that the interest doesn't mount as steadily as it should. It seems to me, too, that the character of the doomed heroine isn't as appealing as it might have been. Yet, with all of its weaknesses, I would be deceiving you if I didn't admit that the drama does in the end achieve a rather haunting spell.

It probably isn't altogether her fault that Jan Farrand is a little colorless as the tiger girl. I thought Louis Jourdan was more effective as the fortune teller, but the most interesting performances are in the smaller roles, by Theodore Bikel as a sympathetic policeman, Rosemary Prinz as the hero's ingenue assistant, Rita Vale as a sophisticated lady, and Joyce Lear as the handsome representative of Death. "Tonight in Samarkand" struck me as an odd mixture of effectiveness and disappointment, with the latter mood slightly prevailing.

DAILY NEWS

February 17, 1955

'Samarkand,' a Romantic Fantasy, Is Lacking in Emotional Appeal

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Tonight in Samarkand" is a charming romantic fantasy employing some excellent stage tricks and a company of more than ordinarily interesting actors. It is, as so often happens

with fantasies—particularly the French ones—rather tenuous, and I am more impressed by its stagecraft than by its emotional appeal.

The play was given an excellent production last evening at the Morosco Theatre, with Louis Jourdan most happily cast as a circus mountebank and with Jan Farrand taking a big step forward in her acting career in the role of a tempestuous tiger-tamer.

The French Touch

"Samarkand" is French, being by Jacques Deval (with the American collaboration of Lorenzo Semple Jr.) and is therefore lightly

ironic, with a good, crisp epigram here and there. It also is reminiscent of so many things, not all of them French; of "Liliom," for example, and of Somerset Maugham; of "Pagliacci," even—and of one of those J. B. Priestley plays in which time is mysteriously juggled around. It is best when it is lively in its first two acts, but less effective when it becomes a sad romance in the third.

Two Strikes Against Her

Deval's story is about a traveling circus in France. The heroine of this little outfit is the tiger

tamer; as played by the fascinating Miss Farrand, she is lithe, temperamental and intensely alive. Naturally, there are many who want her—a juggler, for example; a cynical rich man would like to add her to his collection, and a circus magician and fortune-teller.

The girl, not knowing what or whom she wants, gazes into the seer's crystal ball, and, even though he disclaims any real occult powers, she sees two visions of what might be happening on her next birthday. The first time, she is wed to the juggler and is about to sail for America on a ship that is fated to sink with all hands. The second time she is about to sail with her millionaire on the same doomed vessel. The

third time. . . . Well, this time it's real and no crystal vision—and this is the twist of time and plot that makes the story.

In the play Jourdan does his best work here to date in the part of the love-struck magician. He is resourceful, believable and romantically persuasive. Other roles are admirably played—Theodore Bikel, new to our stage, as an interesting police officer; Alexander Scourby, as a smooth and ruthless man of wealth; Rita Vale, as his overbred and cynical sister, and Michael Gorrin as the owner of the small circus. And there is a calm and fascinating performance by Joyce Lear, who may be Death herself.

Ben Edwards has devised a splendid setting which seems miraculously to dissolve from a circus dressing tent to the other locales the tiger-tamer envisions as she gazes into the magician's crystal sphere, and Sol Kaplan has composed an ingenious and fitting musical accompaniment which is as mood-setting and effective as the score for the film, "Lili." Alan Schneider has directed the very good company with intelligence and imagination.

Daily Mirror

February 17, 1955

'Tonight in Samarkand' Opens at Morosco

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Tonight in Samarkand," which reached the Morosco Theatre Wednesday evening, is like a big circus tent with nothing very much under it. Attributed to Jacques Deval and Lorenzo Semple, Jr., it's a lot of hot air that buoys up the colorful canvas, only to escape with a zizz and let the structure fall to the ground.

THE PLAY has to do with a woman animal trainer in love with a mind reader. Through gazing into his crystal ball, she imagines that she is successively infatuated with a lout of a juggler and a weird millionaire. But fate puts the mental whiz and the tiger tamer on a doomed ship.

The title is taken from an

oriental legend, in which a man flees Baghdad to escape death, only to find it in another town. Kismet, in other words, as the Arabs would have it. It all adds up to a lot of mumbo-jumbo that back in the exciting 1920's might have been mistaken for symbolism and deep thought. Today it spells little better than zero.

Louis Jourdan, glamor boy and excellent actor, has another unprofitable outing as the crystal-ball maestro. When is some playwright or producer going to provide this fellow with a role worthy of his talents?

JAN FARRAND, who has shown to advantage in Shakespeare and Shaw yet, is forced to tackle men and tigers with scant rewards from either. She is by turns a sweater girl, a blouse girl and a plain ordinary dress girl, if you get what we mean. She has a swell figure.

Theodore Bikel is a suave and human French police inspector. Given a rolled umbrella and a bowler, he could pass for one of Scotland Yard's more polished operatives. Rita Vale, in a relatively minor role, proves a crisp and gifted actress. There is a cute and clever youngster, whom we think might be Rosemary Prinz, cast as the petite shill for the half-phony and half-real seer.

Salutes are also due Pernell

Roberts, Marian Reardon, Joyce Lear, Michael Gorin, Alexander Scourby and the beloved Halliwell Hobbes. Mr. Hobbes is rapidly becoming Mr. Britain in America. In other words, an international institution.

BEN EDWARDS has designed tasteful and colorful settings, while Frank Spencer has supplied appropriate costumes. Director Alan Schneider has gotten about as much from little as any competent stager could.

Bruce Becker and Robert Ellis Miller must have spent a fortune on "Tonight in Samarkand." In one episode, the lady tiger tamer is offered an engagement with Ringling Brothers Circus, with three rings, and unless our ears betrayed us, a 1,000-piece orchestra. That should startle John Ringling North and Merle Evans, and should cost more than the Morosco's current tenant.

"Tonight in Samarkand" is the epitome of emptiness, a big top full of wind.

Journal American

February 17, 1955

Facile Acting By Jourdan

Ably Supported by Good Cast
In Play Based on Parable

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT SEEMS THAT THIS servant comes to his caliph one day in old Baghdad and says as follows: "I was just down in the market place and I saw a lady that I recognized to be Death. Not only that but she recognized me and made a threatening gesture. Now since I don't care to die right away, boss, will you lend me your swiftest horse so I can get out of here in a hurry."

So the caliph lent him the horse and he rode away to Samarkand. But that same day the caliph himself went to the market place and saw the same lady and said to her: "Why do you frighten my servant with your silly gestures?" And the lady replied: "I didn't

mean to frighten him; I was just surprised to see him here. You see I have a date with him tonight in Samarkand."

This parable, a durable product which has served other authors in our time, is the basis for "Tonight in Samar-

kand," the Jacques Deval-Lorenzo Semple Jr., drama which opened last night at the Morosco theatre.

Faltering Route

The immutable and unfortunate fact seems to be, however, that once the legend has been told, the rest of the play settles down to a destiny as drab as the original. There is little doubt that the kids will get together in Samarkand, but they take a tortuous and faltering route.

This latest excursion into fatalism involves a circus magician with a crystal ball and a lady tiger-tamer of whom he is enamored. By means of giving her a few ganders into the future he is able to stave off the approaches of a brace of rivals—but the portents are always the same. The doll is on a slow train to Samarkand, and it's only a matter of two acts before she will pull into the station.

It impressed me, unfortunately, that what was to happen to these people, and how, were matters of comparative unimportance. I was not made to feel any great

sympathy for the ball gazer or his fierce and self-centered lady friend. To get some emotional stimulus from the tale I should think one must be disposed to hope that the servant, or the tiger-lady, or whoever, is worth saving short of her destination.

Facile Playing

This does not entirely minimize a strong and facile performance by Louis Jourdan as the magician; or the excellent support of Alexander Scourby, Joyce Lear, Theodore Bikel, Michael Gorin and Halliwell Hobbs.

I must confess that I was less than transported by the efforts of Jan Farrand as the lady with the tigers. This may have been a conception of the director, or the authors, but I thought she offered little in the way of warmth or simplicity.

The production is superb, with appropriate background music and the simulated bustle and hustle of a European carnival. There is even a live baby tiger, but even he, unfortunately, has a date in Samarkand.